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ABSTRACT

A number of Arab countries, particularly those in which English is a foreign language, have gone to considerable lengths to stress and ensure the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction and expression for all branches of higher education. Progress in Arabicization has been accompanied by a diminishing role for the teaching of English to Arab students of science and technology, in which a reasonable knowledge of English is essential for access to scientific literature of the world and to technological advances. In Iraq, the importance of English language study has been emphasized by law in higher education and in the international process of coordinating Arabicization. In the late 1970s, programs were developed at two Iraqi universities to prepare teachers both for teaching and for developing courses in English for science and technology. There is need for further research and program development to expand and improve university English teaching in the Arab world as a means to scientific and technological learning, but it will be dependent on improved coordination among Arab universities and the understanding that a balance of Arabic and English is needed for the process of Arabicization to be effective. (MSE)

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ARABICIZATION AND THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ARAB UNIVERSITIES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE IRAQI EXPERIMENT

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ARABICIZATION AND THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN ARAB UNIVERSITIES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE IRAQI EXPERIMENT

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1. Introduction

1.1 Aim

This paper seeks to investigate the role of English language teaching (ELT) in Arab universities following the headway made by several Arab countries in the field of Arabicization. It is mainly concerned with the countries where English is a foreign language. They include most Asian Arab states in addition to Egypt, Sudan and Libya. The paper first sets out to provide a brief outline of the process of Arabicization in the Arab world. Then it moves to recount the Iraqi experiment, placing special emphasis on the present situation, current pedagogical procedures, the language skills needed and the teaching approach adopted.

1.2 The Hypothesis

Unfortunately, the progress made in Arabicization has been accompanied by a diminishing role for the teaching of English for Arab students of science and technology. A reasonable knowledge of English is essential to help Arab students have access to the world's science literature and also keep pace with today's technological advances. Hence, a sharp need emerges for local research into an area of language teaching and study, namely, English for Special Purposes (ESP), or more specifically, English for Science and Technology (EST).

2. Arabicization

By Arabicization is meant the use of the national language as a medium of instruction and expression for all branches of learning at the university level. A number of Arab countries, particularly Syria, Egypt and Iraq have gone a long way in this enormous process.

However, Arabicization (the rendering of foreign sciences into Arabic) is not at all a new activity. Translation into Arabic flourished during the Abbasid Dynasty and attained its zenith during the rule of al-Ma'mun (813-883). Most of these translations were done from Greek, Persian, Sanskrit and Syriac, often indirectly through the last language. As a result of these activities, Arabic soon acquired the status of a lingua franca for the then sciences and arts.

A detailed and comprehensive study of the methods employed by ancient Arabs to strike a balance between the learning of foreign languages and the predominance of their national tongue in all spheres of knowledge is yet to be attempted and is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, a brief account on the process of Arabicization in a number of Arab countries might be sufficient.

2.1 Syria

Syria is perhaps the pioneer country in Arabicization in the Arab world (al Sayyadi 1980: 128). As early as 1919 the Syrian national authorities had embarked on an ambitious programme of Arabicizing education, army and administration. The University of Damascus comes in the forefront in this respect, with as many as 150 medical titles rendered into Arabic in the same period (Kinani 1965: 35). Now Syria boasts of being in the vanguard of Arab countries not only in terms of the amount of Arabicized university science literature but also in the number of teachers capable of using the national language in the teaching and expression of science and technology.

2.2 Egypt

Early attempts at Arabicization can be traced to Muhammad Ali who is believed to have introduced the first Arabic press in Egypt, the third of its kind in the Arab world. Muhammad Ali is also credited with the first efforts to render medical sciences into Arabic and also with the attempt to teach these sciences in the national language (al-Sayyadi 1980: 130). Under Muhammad Ali and his successor, Ismael, the foundations of what came later to

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be known as the Egyptian School of Translation were laid. This School managed to Arabicize a considerable portion of medical terms (al-Maqdisi 1967: 188).

However, this encouraging start declined following the British occupation of Egypt. It was not until the early sixties, when the newly born Egyptian University and several other academic institutions undertook the translation of most of their science curricula, that Arabicization gathered once again momentum (al-Sayyadi 1980: 132).

2.3 Iraq

Iraq, like Egypt and Syria, has achieved a big leap in the Arabicization of the university curricula. Apart from medicine, most subjects in the colleges of sciences, agriculture and engineering are now taught in Arabic. The process of Arabicization was made legal with the promulgation of a law in 1979, stipulating the formation of a high-ranking committee to supervise the translation of science literature into Arabic. The humanities, geography, archaeology, etc., have been taught in Arabic since a very long time (Hassan al-Dujeili 1965: 61).

2.4 Sudan

Sudan is among the Arab countries which faced serious problems not only in the Arabicization of the university curricula but also in the teaching of science school subjects in Arabic. However, with the help of Egyptian textbooks Sudan managed to Arabicize teaching at the secondary school level in late 1969. Arabicization of education at the university level in Sudan will definitely take sometime as a fair number of professors are still non-Arabs (Lisan Arabi, 1973: 32).

2.5 Lebanon

Lebanon, a mixture of cultures, religions and foreign influences has had, perhaps, better opportunities for Arabicization than any other Arab country. With an Arabic press, that went into operation in 1610 and the presence of several Christian missions belonging to different denominations, Lebanon could indeed have

done a great deal in this respect. However, no noticeable action on the official level has been taken to Arabicize the sciences. Unlike the University of Damascus, which is fully Arabicized, the Lebanese universities - apart from the state-run University of Lebanon which offers several ocurses in Arabic - have not taken the subject seriously and have continued using the foreign language (French and English) as a medium of instruction and expression in most branches of learning (Badr 1969; 230).

2.6 Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia

Although Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia did not suffer from a colonial cultural legacy represented in the dominance of the foreign language in all school levels, as has been the case in the countries of the Arab Maghreb, the three countries have not, so far, achieved noticeable progress in the Arabicization of university science curricula. Apart from the humanities, the medium of instruction remains English in a great number of subjects taught at the colleges of medicine, sciences, engineering and agriculture (Arabicization Conference 1973).

2.7 The Arab Maghreb

The Arab Maghreb, comprising Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, has suffered most from the predominance of foreign culture and education, whose legacy is still widely felt in the four countries. Apart from Libya, the other three countries have not yet managed to Arabicize all of their secondary school scientific textbooks. French is taken in these countries as the second language, with English being taught as a foreign language only in Libya. The countries having French as a second language have not yet embarked on the Arabicization of the university curricula (al-Sayyadi 1980: 138-181). Libya has Arabicized the humanities but has not yet taken a similar step to Arabicize colleges offering courses on science, medicine, engineering and agriculture (Lisan Arabi 1977, Vol. VII: 55).

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3. Arabicization - a national goal

Arabicization is undoubtedly a national goal, strictly pursued by all Arab countries. To achieve this goal a bureau for the coordination of Arabicization in the Arab world was established in 1961. The bureau, backed and financed by all Arab countries through the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ALESCO) has so far held four conferences, the last of which was in 1980. In these conferences, the significance of Arabicizing all forms of education in the Arab world was brought up and recommendations were drawn to reach the state of comprehensive Arabicization by the year 2000, by which, Arabic will hopefully be declared as the lingua franca of science and technology in the Arab world (Proceedings of Arabicization conferences 1961, 1973, 1977, 1980)

However, the high priority given by the bureau for Arabicization has always been accompanied by an emphasis on the role of the foreign language in science and technology. Several articles appearing in the bureau's journal 'al-Lisan al-Arabi' (The Arab Tongue) have proposed a two-pronged policy, whereby most of the science subjects will be taught and studied in Arabic apart from certain ones which should remain in the foreign tongue. Al-Daqaq writes: "with the prevalence of Arabicization a greater degree of emphasis must be placed on the role of the foreign language (Al-Daqaq 1967 : 134).

But, unfortunately, the wide scope assumed by Arabicization has been accompanied with a diminishing role for the teaching of English as a foreign language. Arabicization, as has been stressed by the Conference on the Arabicization of Higher Education in the Arab Homeland, held on 4th April 1978 "must be viewed as a factor adding further significance to the role of English language teaching and not otherwise."

4. English as a lingua franca in science and technology

The English language, according to Quirk et al (1972; 3) is "the world's most important language" and "the most used" one.

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This is reflected in the fact that English is the most used of all languages in the diverse fields of learning.

A recent report published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 1975, 13) asserts that 90% of the world's original literature on scientific and technical subjects is published in English. Another UNESCO report emphasizes that at present more than two thirds of engineering literature in the world is in English.

Arabic translators, though encouraged and handsomely paid by Arab governments and agencies, have managed to translate but a tiny fraction of the material available to university students in the English language. This makes it impossible for Arab students to obtain further knowledge other than what is available in their Arabicized textbooks.

Therefore, it is of great significance that Arab science students should possess a reasonable knowledge of the language as used in their field of study. This significance assumes further dimensions at the graduate level as success in graduate work depends to a large degree on the students' ability to read the appropriate literature in English.

Accordingly, with Arabicisation emerges a sharp need for local research into an area of language teaching and study, namely, English for Special Purposes (ESP), or more specifically, English for Science and Technology (EST). A section on the pedagogical procedures adopted in the teaching of English for science and technology students, with an account on what is going on in Iraq might prove helpful to bring closer the subject of Arabicization and the importance of English language teaching at the university level in the Arab world.

5. Introducing ESP

In the past two decades, the teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) assumed a new trend, by emphasizing the need to specify the aims of learning the foreign language to meet the auxiliary role which it is called upon to play at the university

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level in countries where English is a foreign language. In other words, the auxiliary role of TEFL, at this level, differs a great deal from that set for primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. The learning of English at these levels is part of the general education and is regarded as a good thing to learn.

At the university level, however, the student's needs are further delimited. They need English for certain or special purposes, perhaps to receive or (to a lesser degree) convey information associated with their specialist studies.

This is more true in the Arab countries where most specialist knowledge is not available in the national language, hence the importance of teaching English for clearly utilitarian purposes or special purpose (ESP). The term ESP, which has appeared in the TEFL literature over the last fifteen years, covers three different, but overlapping branches of learning and teaching. They are: (1) English for Academic Purposes (EAP), (2) English for Vocational Purposes (EVP) and (3) English for Occupational Purposes.

It is EAP which is the main concern of this study, since it covers those communicative skills in English which are required for study purposes in a formal education system. ESP literature further divides EAP into two broad, but overlapping sections: English for Social Sciences (ESS) and English for Science and Technology (EST). The latter is of direct and effective bearing on Arab students of science and technology. Therefore, it merits some further explanation.

5.1 English for Science and Technology (EST)

EST, a major subdivision of EAP refers to the teaching of English to the students of all sciences, including agriculture, medicine, engineering and technology. However, a further consideration of the term EST may prove worthwhile.

What is the implication of the term EST? Is it the kind of English found in scientific textbooks and journals? Is it what English people use when talking to each other about certain

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scientific questions? Or is it the English used by a lecturer, lecturing for example on atomic theory? Some ESP specialists (Kerr 1977: 11) believe that EST is all of these, but each one of them is different and the student must be familiar with all of them.

But does an Arab science and technology student need the language for all these purposes? Of course not. The needs of science students differ according to the situation they are in and Arabicization has brought an altogether different situation for EST. Definitely, specific needs and targets would emerge at the university level, and the principal objective of an EST course is to cater for such targets and needs.

6. The Iraqi Experiment

6.1 Historical Background

English was first introduced as a subject of study in Iraq as early as 1873 (Al-Chalabi,1976). However, it was not until 1970 when an eight-man committee set out to thoroughly examine the situation of TEFL in Iraq. During the years 1873-1970, a great deal of dissatisfaction was felt with the results of English language teaching in the country and a reconsideration of the methods and textbooks became an urgent matter (al-Hamash, 1978). In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, this standing committee prepared and published the first textbook of the 'New English Course for Iraq' in 1973 for the fifth year primary school pupils. The rest of the series appeared in succession with a new textbook each year until June 1981 when it was practically completed.

But no such organised efforts were made to prepare TEFL textbooks for the university students. Before the introduction of Arabicisation, little need was felt for a well-designed ESP course for science and technology students. However, following Arabicization in 1977 a pressing need rose for the preparation of such a course as this time the students had to read most, if not all, of their subjects in Arabic.

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6.2 Arabicization and the role of English in Iraq

Arabicization was made legal in Iraq with the promulgation of a law in 1977. Colleges of agriculture, science and most departments of engineering currently use Arabic as the medium of instruction and expression. Only medicine is still taught in English and this definitely will not last long.

Nonetheless, Iraqi officials have never viewed Arabicization as a factor leading to a declining role for English. On the contrary, several articles in the Arabicization law stress the significance of the foreign language. Article Ten makes it incumbent on college authorities to keep on teaching at least one basic subject for every academic year in English, "to help students have a mastery of the foreign language as used in their field of study." Furthermore, the Law calls for the development of a well-organised programme for the teaching of the foreign language at the university level to "help students have access to the world's science literature and keep abreast with current technological advances."

It is worthwhile to point out that similar significance has been attached to the role of English after Arabicization by the bureau for the coordination of Arabicization in Arab countries.

This is a clear indication that both Arab and Iraqi authorities are fully aware of the greater role the English language must assume after Arabicization. Such an attitude towards English is created not only by the technical problems and difficulties of translating the immeasurable amount of existing foreign science and technology literature but also by the need for keeping abreast with research in these two important fields.

6.3 Current Situation

Three factors have determined the current state of English language programme at Iraqi universities: (1) The predominance of Arabicization and its subsequent effect on students' proficiency in English, (2) the standardised policy of curricula construction which has resulted in the unification of English

language programmes for each separate college and (3) the inauguration, in the late seventies, of higher studies at Mosul and Basra universities to prepare teachers specialised in both teaching and preparing EST programmes.

6.3.1 Specifying Students Needs

The language courses available before 1977 were not meant to cater for the utilitarian purpose which the students of Arabicized colleges needed the language for. Therefore, the first step taken by the English departments at both Basra and Mosul universities was to specify the needs arising from the new teaching situation. Different sets of questionnaires were prepared for different colleges. Staff, students and administrators of each college took part in answering the questionnaires with great enthusiasm.[1] In the light of the responses to these questionnaires the organisers of English language courses set out to prepare the syllabuses with the material that would satisfy the prescribed needs. Methodological procedures were decided upon accordingly.

The questionnaires, conducted by ESP graduates and distributed to the staff, students and administrators of various Arabicized colleges, have been unanimous in their results that English is mainly needed for the specific purpose of understanding the available science and technology literature.

6.3.2 The Textbooks

After analysing and identifying the students needs it became necessary to set up the guidelines that would determine the design of textbooks. The new situation necessitated that language teaching material at the university level should not only aim at enabling the students to recognise lexis and structures or learn the four language skills as individual or separate activities. It should rather develop the students language competence in order to enable them to understand authentic science and technology literature.

As a result, great emphasis has been placed on the textbooks designed to build up a communicative adequacy in the students

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through the utilization of functions in scientific procedures and concepts. The 'Focus Series' (1973) and 'Nucleus Series' (1976) were temporarily chosen for the teaching of English at the Arabicized colleges.

6.3.3 EST Graduate Studies

Two EST graduate courses were started, one in Mosul and the other in Basra in the academic year 1977-1978. The principal aim behind these courses was the preparation of qualified teachers who would shoulder the responsibility of English language teaching following Arabicization.

The research work, carried out by the scores of EST graduates, whether in Mosul or Basra has been of paramount importance in shaping the approach to the design and teaching of English at Iraqi universities.

The bulk of this research - the whole of it is unpublished yet, but kept in the files of the language academy for reference by the interested researchers - can be divided into two parts, each tackling one aspect of EST. The first looks into the syntax or lexis of scientific and technological discourse and the second studies closely the current EST methodologies with the aim of designing for each group of learners (engineering, medicine, agriculture, etc.) the type of course suitable to the local situation.

7. Approach and Presentation of Classroom Activity

The approach recommended for both the design and presentation of teaching material discards textbooks and methodological procedures which rely heavily on the teaching of lexis and grammatical structures in isolation of genuine authentic pieces of science and technology. A shift to the notional (conceptual) approach as expounded by Widdowson (1974, 1975, 1978) has unanimously been adopted by EST teachers, whose unpublished theses and actual teaching experience have proved the validity of teaching/learning and understanding of scientific notions, activities and the way they are realised in English through different structural forms.

However, Widdowson's ideas as represented in the 'Focus Series' and 'Nucleus Series' have not been borrowed as they are. Exercises and even the reading passages have been modified and sometimes changed to suit the situation of each particular group of learners. Thus, notions, which are directly related to the scientific concepts already known to the students have been given the highest priority in the classroom.

For example, the following simple equation is expressed non-verbally alike in both Arabic and English and perhaps in most other languages. For an EST teacher it could be a good start to build up students' language competence on how equations are realised in English:

$$Q = A \times V$$

The underlying, non-verbal information in this equation can be realised in terms of its surface structure in both Arabic and English as follows:

Q = A x V الكمية تساوي المساحة مضروبة في السرعة

Quantity equals area multiplied by velocity

(Hassan, 1979; 87)

At this stage, the students would get familiar with one basic scientific notion, namely equations. The presentation of further equations in this way in the classroom would undoubtedly lead to the students' realisation that symbols like (Q, A, V, C, P, etc.) represent nouns (or rather noun phrases) and signs like (x, =, etc.) represent verbs (or rather verb phrases).

Exercises such as these might be regarded as a first step towards the development of other exercises which would increase the communicative competence of the students. Furthermore, these exercises would also be of direct relevance to the students as far as the genuine scientific material is concerned.

8. Conclusion

Arabicization has become a national goal which is strongly pursued by all Arab countries. In the year 2000 ALESCO hopes

to declare Arabic as the lingua franca of science and technology in the Arab world.

With the accelerating process of Arabicization a sharp need emerges for the teaching of English at Arab universities. The main reason for this is the fact that the bulk of scientific material is written in a language of which Arab science students know very little.

Therefore, it is necessary to develop, expand and improve the teaching of English at the university level in the Arab world. Iraq has gone a long way in this respect. Its experiment, briefly outlined in this paper, could serve as an example for other Arab countries engaged in the Arabicization process.

But the lack of coordination among Arab universities in the realm of EST makes the situation unclear as to where other Arab countries, passing through the same situation as Iraq's, are now standing.

A regional EST conference devoted to the local situation in each Arab country might do a great deal to make up for this regrettable lack of coordination.

Notes

1. The questionnaires have been designed by the graduates of ESP and they are kept in the scores of unpublished theses at both Mosul and Basra universities.

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